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Interview with Deane Rast Risher

Deane Rast Risher
SC Mother of the Year 2004

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Mrs. Deane Risher Interview – July 15, 2015
2004 South Carolina Mother of the Year

Dr. Disney: Good morning. My name is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney and I'm honored to be interviewing Deane Risher, the 2004 South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Winner. Thank you so much, Deane, for meeting with us today.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Thank you for inviting me.

Dr. Disney: Why don't we start by having you tell us a little bit about when and where you were born and raised?

Mrs. Deane Risher: I was born in Cameron, South Carolina, which is in Camden County and I was born on a farm in the country in 1931, I should add.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about your family and your early childhood experience.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I was blessed in my family. My mother was a school teacher and my father had grown up on a farm, so he was a devoted farmer. I guess one of the defining things about my family – I had two older brothers who were identical twins, so being that close in age, I became quite a tomboy and tried to do everything they could do and tried to do it better. So I became quite competitive. In fact, if they had something really hard to do – we made a pulley from a tree that came down to the ground – they had me go first.

Dr. Disney: Interesting.

Mrs. Deane Risher: And another thing I remember when we built our house, we had an upstairs, and they were too afraid to go upstairs, but I was the first one to sleep upstairs.

Dr. Disney: So you did everything, not only better, but first.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, that might be. But it did influence my personality, I guess you'd say.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about your education and your young adult life.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well I remember I was really excited to go to school and I should say I went to Cameron School, which was at the time I went, about ninety students grades one through twelve. In fact, in my graduating class, there were nine of us. So it was like a very exclusive private education. We loved our teachers, Cameron School totally enforced everything we were learning in our church and in our home. It was just a very positive influence. In fact, now we still have reunions, over three or four-hundred who come, who went to Cameron School, it actually closed during consolidation about 1966, but we still get together and marvel at the wonderful education we had and then the careers and the places that so many of the graduates have served. You know, there's another Mother of the Year that came from Cameron School, Betty Jean McGregor, who became the National Mother, so you can tell.

Dr. Disney: Yes, we're going to interview her soon.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Cameron School, it was really a special place. Let's see, that was my early education. Yes, I was very active in student affairs, President of the student government, Beta Club in those days. Oh, I can't think of it all. In the summers, we had the 4H Club and the 4H Camp. We went to the Future Homemakers of America provided a camp, we did all that.

Dr. Disney: I know you also have a Winthrop University connection, right?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Right. Well and then, I was always interested in writing and I was an avid reader. I remember we had a very small library and I read all the books in the library, that was a good background. But I went to a journalism workshop at Winthrop, I think it was during my

senior year at Cameron School. And it just captivated me, Winthrop, and so I never looked around at colleges or so much of what they do today. I decided that I'm going to Winthrop and at that time, Winthrop was producing most of the teachers in South Carolina and had a wonderful training school to teach so I finished Winthrop in 1954 with a degree in English, a B.A. in English and a minor in Latin and Journalism with a certificate to teach in secondary school, which is high school. So I was very excited about that.

Dr. Disney: When you think back to those years, your Winthrop college years, what were your dreams, goals, and aspirations as a young woman?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I suppose I never thought of anything but being a teacher, you know, I don't remember considering a lucrative profession, the drawback from being a teacher, which is just what I wanted to be, so kind of naïve, I'd say. That's kind of the way it went and you know, I did value very much a woman's education, in fact, I think there's a place for that. But the times have kind of turned out to be a little different. You know, my husband went to the Citadel, and I said to him, "You know what? You need to be active about Winthrop being a women's college," which I was very much in favor of because The Citadel was kind of the men's college in the state.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about how you met your husband.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well it was a very big coincidence. My twin brothers were in the wedding of this friend of their's in Cameron, who married a girl from Bamberg, South Carolina and one of the bridesmaids was my husband's sister, Mary. So after that, my brothers made friends with Mary, I think both of them dated Mary, you know from time to time, but she told her young brother, Lainey, about me and that Lainey really needed to come up and in those days, that was really not unheard of. So he called me up for a blind date, you remember blind dates? And so I don't remember much, but I said yes and the date was at my house and he brought his younger brother along. So he came to my house, it was the first time I met him on that blind date, and so we kind of hit it off, as you say, very well. He was a junior at the Citadel, or maybe a rising senior, at that time, he finished in 1953 and we met in '52. So I was a sophomore at Winthrop, rising junior I suppose, and we corresponded in those days, we didn't use a telephone, long distance was a big no-no, and we wrote letters. Every day, I went to the P.O. 713 at Winthrop and most times, he would have a letter and I was writing back, so those letters really tell a lot about our college experience. We haven't thrown them away yet.

Dr. Disney: That's beautiful. So you still have all those letters you wrote to each other?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I started throwing them away, pitching them in the fire and then I said, "You know what? I think I'm gonna stay in touch with this young woman and this young man because marriage does change you through the years." Well rather than change you, you grow in other ways in marriage.

Dr. Disney: Exactly. So tell us about those years after college, both of you getting married, and then take us through the birth of your children.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I'll be real quick on this, but one thing is that at Winthrop, I should say my education at Winthrop was \$1,500 for four years. My senior year, well maybe it was \$1,750, my senior year I was awarded a scholarship for one semester but, I did finish in three and a half years. My husband and I were dating and in those days, the 1950s, early '50s, ROTC students were required to serve two years in service, so all of our friends, most of them, went to a

military service of two years and he was one of those. And so when he went in, the Korean War was at its peak and we were dating and we kind of were wondering about our future. So, he was at Fort Benning, Georgia and I went to visit him in the summer. And so about a week after I got home, it was about August 1st, excuse me August the 7th, because he called us on a Tuesday night, he called me and said, "Deane, why don't we get married?" So, I said, "Well, let me think about it." Obviously we had talked about getting married, but he said, "I was thinking about Sunday." This was a Tuesday night. Oh, it threw my family and we had quite a discussion on that, some of my mother's good friends came in to help us. But we decided that night to get married on Sunday, I don't know how she pulled it off. On the day of the wedding, she looked out the door and looked at all the people and said, "Well this is pretty good for a "you tell 'em wedding." But I bought a wedding dress and we put the announcement in the local church bulletins and lots and lots of people came. So, we didn't have a honeymoon because his commander gave him one day off, the weekend, and I was due back at Winthrop in three weeks. So it was kind of unusual. There might have been one more marriage like it, but it was a little bit out of the ordinary.

Dr. Disney: So what year was this for you?

Mrs. Deane Risher: This was 1953, August on 1953, got married on August the 16th, went back to Winthrop where I was very active in the student government, the judicial board, and those kind of things at Winthrop.

Dr. Disney: Of course, though, you were very active in this community.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Yes, I think I was president of my junior class, so I was always interested. In fact, one of the things my husband and I discussed at length in our letters was the honor code that they had at the Citadel because I was very interested that we get an honor code at Winthrop, finding out how it worked and those kind of things, we corresponded quite a bit about it.

Dr. Disney: And so you returned for your senior year as a married student, married woman.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Yes, I returned my senior year, but I must have been thinking about something because I had taken a correspondence course in the summer, I had to finish it after...y'all probably don't understand what correspondence courses are, it's kind of like how it is online now I guess, but it's a course in education to complete my secondary degree school certification, I should say. So, I completed it and it gave me the proper requirements to finish in January, but I didn't have a graduation either. But I went back and graduated with my class in June, I remember that the academic dean strongly counseled me when I talked to him about finishing early and stuff, to please stay the whole semester so I could use that extra time to just take more subjects. But, you know, my mind was set on another direction and I should say, as it happened. I didn't mention this, but my husband was stationed to go to Korea, for the Korean War, but it didn't happen. He didn't have to go after all. But anyways, then I moved down to Fort Benning in January, I went back, and I taught in the schools there, in the high school. First, I was a substitute teacher and then they asked me to take a position that I was not prepared for, but it was teaching second grade in a little outlying school where a lot of families were coming in. It was a very fluctuating type community. Anyways, you won't believe this, but I had fifty second graders, no aide, and I was married, this would be a year after I was married.

Dr. Disney: One teacher and fifty students?

Mrs. Deane Risher: It's true.

Dr. Disney: Wow.

Mrs. Deane Risher: And I figured out second grade and I figure out a lot of things, you know called on their parents and so forth. In fact, my voice was very challenged and after about six or seven months of it, I kind of lost my voice, but that's another story. And then, after that year he was released and then we went to Bamberg where his father has a boarding school and my husband was undecided about his profession, but he told his dad he would work in the school, whatever he wanted to do, and just see if it was a good fit. And so he did and it was a good fit and we stayed there three years before his father had the opportunity to open a school in Camden, South Carolina, a boarding school and so he sent us up there at age twenty-six to open Camden Military Academy and there we've been ever since. We spent our working years there.

Dr. Disney: Wow, Camden Military Academy.

Mrs. Deane Risher: And it's a high school, seventh through twelfth grade, for young boys.

Dr. Disney: So tell us about the birth of your children.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I was, I should say after about Kim was born in 1956 in Bamberg and I think I should mention that being a tomboy, I never played with dolls or have been particularly interested in babies and that sort of thing, but I think the Lord put in my heart a real love for my child, it must be an instinct, that enabled me to put all my attention to the task and I thoroughly enjoyed being a mother and of course, looking back, my background and training and interests just helped me to provide my children with an atmosphere of learning and encouragement and those kind of things.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. So you had Kim in 1956?

Mrs. Deane Risher: And then Jenny came along about eighteen months later in 1957. By then, we moved to Camden with two small children and I was challenged right away. There were a lot of needs, this was not a school that had been running, we had to prepare the facilities and being the school and our first enrollment was the overflow from my father-in-law's school in Bamberg. He had open enrollment and a waiting list of about ninety and a lot of them came to Camden.

Dr. Disney: Your family, you were really founding directors of the school, Camden Military Academy.

Mrs. Deane Risher: And so I had responsibility for the dining hall there, I had an English degree, you know it wasn't my first interest, but my mother-in-law, Emma Jane Risher, who I should mention was also was South Carolina Mother of the Year, my husband likes to say he's the only man in South Carolina who has a mother for a Mother of the Year and a wife for Mother of the Year. I say he needed a lot of help, that's what I think.

Dr. Disney: What an amazing honor, mother-daughter team, both Mothers of the Year.

Mrs. Deane Risher: But anyway, she was a dietitian and took care of the food purchases and planning at Carlisle Military School, so she trained me and gave me a lot of direction. I did that about ten years while my children were small. But back to my children, Dee-Dee, the third, was born in 1959, or you'll see in a minute, anyways, Dee-Dee's birth was very difficult because we had gone to Bamberg to visit for the weekend and she was born at seven months and I always am thankful to Watson who is a husband of a Mother of the Year in Bamberg, Mary Carolynn Watson, for assisting, for really being responsible for Dee-Dee's safe arrival. He insisted that I breastfeed that little baby, which was kind of difficult, I mean. Anyways, it was possible. And so she stayed in the hospital down in Bamberg for about twenty-four days and at the time, my

husband was getting his degree in history at the university to supplement his other degrees. Starting this birth and his school, we were pretty pressed and stressed. But my mother helped out with Jenny and my mother-in-law, Emma Jane, with Kim. So then, in 1961, Julianne was born and in 1962, Mary Elizabeth, and you can see, this is all girls. Oh and those days it was so surprising what you had and I will have to say, I'm sure my husband was looking for a boy, but he had five beautiful daughters of whom he is extremely proud and they have a very close and loving relationship. He always said he had five girls and two-hundred and fifty cadets and he could manage those cadets a lot better.

Dr. Disney: I was about to say, you both mothered and fathered five beautiful daughters, but also hundreds of kids, if not thousands, of boys through the years at Camden Military.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Yeah, Camden Military was a natural laboratory for teaching your children everything they need to learn, servanthood, helping out, being innovated and creative and resourceful, it was no telling who would come to the door and need what. But we welcomed a lot people that didn't know and they have carried those skills that they learned, even down to feeding and prompting a big crowd, and that's kind of unusual these days. And my girls somehow learned how to do it and they're wonderful people.

Dr. Disney: You sort of mentioned this earlier, but let me ask you this. What does motherhood mean to you?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, motherhood, I looked at children as a gift from God and I feel that we are responsible, as mothers, to nurture them, to teach them, to guide them as best we can. I do believe they are kind of a package of who they are and one part of our job is to help them unwrap that package and ascertain what their strong places are and what they can be. One of my daughters commented to me recently, "You know, Mom, growing up, we never thought about being girls." Gender wasn't really a big thing we emphasized, it was more "who are you" and "what can you do" and "how can you help."

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. You want to tell us a little bit more about your daughters, what they do or where they live or grandchildren, anything about that?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Wow, how much time do you have? Well, I think that I do want to say somewhere in here say that women don't have to get married, but everyone has a mother, so we are all related in this row, we can all buy into it because we all have mothers, so we're connected. But I'm very proud of my children. Well, that's probably the wrong word to use, but to show you the diversity, one is a lawyer and she's unmarried. One runs a school, growing up she always wanted to run a school in the Washington area, a Christian school. One is a teacher, one is a writer, and one is a homemaker. So, one of the nicest things about it, you get this being Mother of the Year, is that they all had to write something about their mother and I treasure, each one wrote a little essay, and I treasure that because you don't take time in life much to tell each other things that are really meaningful, you know. You talk about the weather, talk about inanities, they say I talk about food a lot, but you don't take the time to tell each other what you really value, what's really important. So I like to save those little treasures.

Dr. Disney: Thank you for sharing that with us. I'm going to go home and write an essay about my mother and my father so that they can look at that and know exactly what you said, we don't tell our loved ones exactly what they mean to us. So that's a beautiful lesson that we can give to

future generations of women and men who watch this video. Let me ask you this, what did it mean to you to be named the South Carolina Mother of the Year in 2004.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I was totally shocked, I did not know ahead of time that I had been nominated and so when I picked up that phone, I think Gwen, on the other line, Gwen Howell thought I was going to refuse it because I was so shocked. Of course, then when I thought about it, I was humbled because I quickly got the feeling that I was representing all mothers and I totally admire women. I read a lot of women's diaries from the 1800s and the 1900s so I do relate to their role or their calling in life and so I did feel that I represented all women.

Dr. Disney: What was that year like, your year of service as the Mother of the Year? Talk us through maybe some of the activities, I know the Governor's Mansion is involved for all the Mothers of the Year, so talk us through that year.

Mrs. Deane Risher: It was really great going to the mansion and making up a guest list. One of the hardest things was when you had to get together a little booklet when you wrote down what is your philosophy on parenting, which was kind of challenging, but after you got these requirements done, which they presented I think to the national committee, yeah the mansion, the reception, I know Jenny Sanford was so gracious and she was so devoted to her boys and I remember she said, I asked them all at the breakfast table what do you think our mother should be. Her comment was so meaningful in the news conference, you know. So then after that, I guess one of the high points, my mother was staying at the time, she was very ill and she was at Still Hopes, the retirement home in Columbia. She was actually too ill to come to the reception and she died the next month. She died in April, in 2004. Anyways, one of the high points was one of the women of Still Hopes, one of the staff invited me over to speak to the women and let me tell you, it was so humbling, it was just so inspiring to be with those women, to hear their questions, to hear something about their lives. They're on the last years and that was one of the high points of my year, of course we went on to Puerto Rico to the National Convention. It was quite impressive, I can't tell you how impressive it was, not only to meet the mothers from all the states, but the young mothers were really phenomenal. It was wonderful to meet all those people, and then after that, I don't remember too much else. Oh, I got lots of letters, you talk about people saying things that encourage you, I got a lot of encouragement.

Dr. Disney: Well you were obviously a phenomenal young mother, you raised five girls, you were helping your husband run the Camden Military Academy, I sure you involved in a lot of activities inside and outside the home, community, church. Please share with us any other activities you were involved in that you want to share. I also want to talk to you a little bit about how did you do it, how were you able to balance all that work inside the home and all that work you were doing outside the home in terms of family, employment, education, civic and church. So tell us all that you did and tell us how you did it.

Mrs. Deane Risher: I hope I can go back and try to answer all of that. Well first, let me say that running the life in the school was right in line, remember I was trained to teach high school for a living. Age group is the group I've always really liked of teenagers and there was a lot to do there. Through the years, I found some relief in the dining hall. I didn't continue that, although I did get back into it about 1990, after. So we had a very good staff that kind of helped me a lot, took it over in fact during the young years of my children, the growing up years. In fact, I wrote her a letter of appreciation when she retired, Mrs. Bessie Davis. She was excellent. Then, I ran

the student canteen and that was just a wonderful laboratory of teaching my children, they learned to serve there and we were able to provide a place for the boys to come that was like home. And then the final club, with some other faculty wives, we decided to take the cadets on trips to study history, art, things to do with the fine arts, so that was an opportunity. I worked in the church, of course, with teaching Sunday School, and you know, sponsoring the young people. So with my own children in it, it was kind of a natural thing to do. In the community, we had the parent teacher organization, we were active in the school through the PTA, and other things like that. In our community, we have the Camden Community Ministries, which I was on the founding board for that. It's over thirty churches that come together to provide help for families in stress and different kinds of need which we try to identify in our communities, and it's still going on, I would say that was what year, I mean it must be at least thirty years old, we're still thriving. What were your other questions? Oh, I should mention that in our church, in our later years, this was after the children left, we were able to be active in the Alpha course, in fact my husband and I were leaders for that for a number of years. It's just a basic study of the Christian around a meal and a small group, teaching a small group, and we've been able to take that to our local prison, which is a state prison. Through the years, I guess for about fifteen years, we worked with the Alpha course, and are working on that now.

Dr. Disney: So prison ministry is something else that you've been involved in. That's amazing. How have you done it all? How have you been able to balance all these different things?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well it doesn't all come at one time. You know, the children, of course, what I mentioned to you, they learned some way to cook a meal, but they helped, just like children help, most times. We all worked together, we all were a team.

Dr. Disney: What do you think young women today, thinking about your daughters, how do you think young women today are able to balance work inside the home, work outside the home, there seems to be more of a pressure for women and men to have two-income families today, so when they're all working as much outside the home for a wage as they're working inside the home with the family, so what do you think about the struggles of young women today, like your daughters, granddaughters have in terms of balance in a working family?

Mrs. Deane Risher: I just don't see how they do it, to tell you the truth. Some of my children made the comment "you know, Mom, we didn't really know you worked until we grew up and we found out what work is." Because the work is there, and whether it brings in an income or not, and yes I think that is a great deal of pressure on young women today to earn an income. However, I know from my own experience that when they have children, sometimes they have second thoughts about what is their first call or priority and I see them struggle with this. Many of them are choosing to be a little counter-cultural, they're choosing other ways to care for their families and also be productive in some way.

Dr. Disney: Do you think women's work and women's roles as mothers are adequately recognized by society?

Mrs. Deane Risher: In a way, I would say that no one's work in this life is really recognized properly by society, because actually, God does recognize us. We really are living our lives before one and even though we don't receive public recognition, a good, well done task or job is recognized by Him and also, I think we need to remember it has a powerful influence. Whatever we do and however we spend our time, for future generations, really does. It's really not so much

about recognition, as dedication, devotion, tenacity, resourcefulness. And those attributes, they're winners in any society, I think, and produce, influence the fabric of our culture. And I think I would tell everyone you are very, very important. Of course, the same message is true for men, they're very, very important and it does make a difference.

Dr. Disney: That is beautiful, that is so well said. Thank you for saying that. Let me ask you a few more broader questions to get your wisdom to share with us. What do you think are the most issues facing women today?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, raising their children is an important issue that's facing, because it's so crucial for the fabric, as I mentioned, of our society. I think what to do with electronics is really concerning young mothers and frankly, I don't know the answer. I do have one family, one of my daughters' families really couldn't afford all these cellphones and they didn't want to afford them. Even their children, they only got them, well I say that the younger child has one they got at a younger age, but the first four only got them when they were kind of seniors in high school. I noticed with one of those, he's not that interested in all the electronic stuff. He's not wedded to it. But anyways, electronics is one of the big decisions they have to make.

Dr. Disney: I agree with you. I have a five year old boy myself, so I know about the pros and cons of electronics.

Mrs. Deane Risher: I did think about this question and one other thing I wanted to say is the pressure to earn money. One of my daughters point out, she said if you choose a special school, funded, you know send them to kindergarten and then there's childcare, all the activities you want them to become proficient in, encourage them in all these opportunities you want to make available, she said it takes money and it takes two incomes. So, I think the choices they make, that's one of the things they're pressured about.

Dr. Disney: And it becomes even harder, as you said, for women to balance work and family, the pressure to earn money and to be the best mother you can be. How important do you think it is to have a father, a husband who is a true partner in terms of the money making and the work in the family home?

Mrs. Deane Risher: It's very, very important and sometimes I think we need a department of Men's Studies to help men in their roles. It's a balance for them too, you know. Men, I realized this the further along I got in marriage, men have a lot of pressures in their jobs and that's something that women have not been exposed to as much until they have gone out to earn money and they get this pressure, all of the sudden they have this tremendous pressure, "I need to be with my child, I'm missing an important occasion in their life, but my job calls me here." Women and men have grappled with those kind of pressures and I think they need more understanding, you know, than we perhaps give them. Maybe both sexes are growing and understanding each other. But yes, they need a father and a mother and I think it's important to say that they bring different qualities, different services to the raising of children.

Dr. Disney: I think that's so important. We've expanded with not just Women's Studies, but Women's and Gender Studies for that very reason, so we just don't look at women, but we look at gender and the relationships between women and men and all of the psychological, social, and economic variables that help examine those relationships inside the home, outside the home, in society, so I think you're really on to something with recognizing the pressures that men have

experienced and then working on that relationship, that partnership inside the home and outside the home that's very important.

Mrs. Deane Risher: I couldn't agree more.

Dr. Disney: What does feminism mean to you?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, I think as we've talked, I've kind of realized that I don't really divide people into groups that much. To me, we need to consider people as human beings and that we're about developing, or helping them develop who they are as human beings, and it goes in different directions for men and different directions for women, but it should be a fulfillment of who they really are.

Dr. Disney: So I was just going to ask you if you consider yourself a feminist, but you may consider yourself a humanist? A humanist feminist or a humanist, your focus is human beings and the development of human beings.

Mrs. Deane Risher: And I should say to me, my faith has been a tremendous influence, it's why we live, to know God and serve Him. So, that kind of settles a lot of questions, as I mentioned to you, we don't need to have recognition for every little thing we do, maybe that's one thing we're overdoing with our children. They are special, they are unique, but you know, they are in a place that their childhood puts them in, so we should be aware of that. I don't know if I was saying much of that.

Dr. Disney: That's beautiful. One thing I would say, on the subject of your daughters, you have raised five daughters, and so I know as a mother of you, I know my mother and father always wanted us to know that we could be and do anything in the world we wanted to be.

Mrs. Deane Risher: I agree.

Dr. Disney: Growing up as a tomboy with two older brothers and so, I know that's one value we share and that's maybe one contribution we can make, that women and men, boys and girls, they can be and do anything that they want to be and do with equal opportunities supplied in their families and in their choices and in society. And it sounds like you raised five strong daughters and women who share the same values of faith, family, love, commitment, and courage, and all those wonderful attributes you mentioned earlier.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Yeah, I am real please that my children have all grown up to have faith of their own, they go to church, none of them have chosen the denomination we go to. But, I didn't mention this, but you do have grandchildren, in other words, you are influencing a large family, and some of our grandchildren, my oldest grandson has a ministry in the inner city of East St. Louis and I have a granddaughter who went to Germany and had a ministry at a coffee house there for a year and so it's just gratifying to see them move in the lives of service and also lives devoted to things that matter, like, you know, one's faith and one's character, the way one lives their life.

Dr. Disney: That's amazing. Do you have any questions for us or anything else you'd like to share?

Mrs. Deane Risher: Let's see, I think I don't. I'd like to know what led you, you were the last of three daughters, the youngest, into Women's Studies.

Dr. Disney: That's a great question. I grew up with a mom and dad who just always valued an education, always valued equality, always valued justice, and so I think I was attracted early on to examining equality and freedom and justice for all human beings and for different groups

within society. So I grew up with a kind of sensitivity to class inequality, race inequality, gender inequality, so I think this attracted me to study power in society and I had a great mentor at my undergraduate university who taught me all about the politics of the developing world and got me studying Africa and Latin America. So it just all kind of, I think my family training, my educational training just kind of showed my interest in studying different people around the world and different people's struggles to achieve their equality and justice.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Very interesting.

Dr. Disney: I want to ask you one more thing about the prison ministry. Tell us a little bit more about how you got involved in prison ministry and what you do. I think for a lot of people, they don't know what that means, so tell us more about prison ministry.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Well, the way we got involved was really through the Alpha course. We had done that in our church for about four years and I guess over two hundred people have come from different denominations. We had made the friendship with chaplain down at the Wateree Prison which is about twelve miles below Camden. So we all together talked with her about the Alpha course and she was very interested and so we started, we have a team, it started with a team, and as I told you it started with teaching, well it's really out of a church in Columbia, but it's really over two million people in the world who have done the Alpha course. I say if you ever get a chance to go, do, because it's for everybody. And so, we did that there and we didn't have meal there, but it's a teaching and then we have a small group. And I think it's one of the things that the prisoners, we didn't have a whole lot of questioning at the end about what they learned, why they were there, and what would be the result of having taken the course. One thing that I'll mention that the fact of them being able to say what they thought in a small group and being listened to was very different from other opportunities that they'd been given in the Christian faith in prison. They had a lot bible teaching, which is kind of telling you how it is sometimes, but this interaction, they always pointed out, was very meaningful to them. And we, I'll tell you, learned more from them than they learned from us. It is totally inspiring to see the faith of people who, you say, have hit the bottom of opportunity, but they are so full of hope and some of their faith walks are just inspiring. And the Lord is at work in the prison and it's one of the most gratifying things I've ever done.

Dr. Disney: Thank you for sharing that with us. To me, everything you just said and your life's work is a true representation of what a life committed to service can be and true commitment to humanity, I mean you're helping all human beings find their humanity within, their deepest humanity, people who have made mistakes, people in prison, boys in the military, and you're helping people find their truest humanity through the their fate by showing them they are a child of God, it's just beautiful.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Thank you so much.

Dr. Disney: Thank you. Congratulations on your 2004 Mother of the Year Award.

Mrs. Deane Risher: If I could just say one more thing, this is something I said I would tell you. I make it a point sometimes to sometimes particularly talk to young mothers in the grocery line and you know, just encourage them. But there's one thing that's really encouraged me, and as a mother, I cannot imagine being a mother without being on your knees and asking how can I do this, you know how can I fill this task before me? Isaiah, I think it's 40:10 says, "Do not be discouraged, do not fear, for I am with you. I will take your hand and I will help." And so, I have

it written down here and I often share this and press this in a young mother's pocket and because, listen, it's just wonderful to know that He said that and He'll do that, "do not fear," he will help you. And I've found that to be true.

Dr. Disney: That is beautiful. What wonderful advice for the future generations of young mothers and young fathers that will watch this video. Thank you so much, Deane Risher, 2004 Mother of the Year. We really appreciate your time today.

Mrs. Deane Risher: Thank you.

Dr. Disney: Thank you.